



collected and rewritten by Phillip Martin

"Stay away from those pots," warned the older brother. "Don't touch them."

.. "What are you talking about?" demanded the younger brother.

"Something about them bothers me. Why are they all upside down? I have the feeling that there is something magical about them," explained the older brother. "We would do best to leave them alone and get out of here."

"Look, brother, you may be older but I think I'm wiser. Here we've been out hunting all morning and have not seen any game or anything else of interest. Now finally we come across these pots, and you say I shouldn't touch them. They might be magical. Well, I personally could use a little magical excitement in my day."

The younger brother ran over to the row of pots. Slowly he turned the first one back up the right way and peered inside. Safely away at a distance, the older brother called out, "What do you see?"

"Absolutely nothing!" laughed the younger brother. "There is nothing in the pot. Now come on over here and help me check out the other ones."

The older brother held his ground, refusing to get any closer.

"Nothing under the second pot either!" the younger brother called out.

"Come on, big brother, help me explore this mystery."

Still, the older brother stood his ground. So, the younger brother continued to turn the pots the right way up. One by one he explored the containers. And one by one he found nothing under them. But as he finally turned the last pot over, the younger brother let out a shout. Inside the pot, much to his surprise, was a little old woman.

She crawled out of the pot without saying a word to the little brother. In fact, she ignored him completely, turning her gaze upon the older brother instead. She raised a wrinkled finger up to his nose and laughed, "Why are you standing there like someone who has seen a ghost? I'm just an old woman, and I cannot possibly hurt you. Now, if you will just follow me, I'll show you something that is really worth getting your attention."

But, the brother wouldn't move from where he stood. He was so frightened that he could not so much as take one step in her direction. "Foolish boy!" cackled the old woman. "Well, it is your loss." She turned to finally address the younger brother. "Are you a coward as your brother, or are you up for some adventure?"

The younger brother didn't need a second invitation. He was ready for any adventure this old woman was prepared to show him. Following the woman deep in the bush where people rarely ever go, the old woman directed the boy to a very large tree. "Here's your adventure, boy. Take the axe and cut down this tree."

"But we're in the middle of nowhere, old woman," declared the boy. "What can we possibly do with the tree after it is cut down?"

"Are you going to stand there arguing with me, or are you going to take part in the adventure that I have in mind for you?" asked the old woman.

Still not sure why he was doing it, the young brother took the axe from the old woman. And to his great amazement, as soon as the first stroke of the axe hit the trunk, a strong bull stepped out of the tree. In fact, after each stroke of the axe, some kind of animal stepped out. Before the tree was finally cut down, a large herd of bulls, cows, sheep, and goats surrounded the younger brother.

"These herds are for you," instructed the old woman. "Thank you for humoring me today. Now be on your way and drive them back to your home before it gets too late."

For the first time in a long time, the younger brother was almost at a loss for words. However, he finally remembered his manners and thanked the old

woman for her generous gift. As he left her in the bush, he shook his head and mumbled to himself, "Nobody is ever going to believe this story." He still didn't quite believe it himself when he finally made his way back to where his older brother waited for him. "Just look at all the herds that old woman gave me!" exclaimed the younger brother. "Now, don't you wish you had been brave enough to go with her when she asked?"

The younger brother explained what happened in the bush as the two drove the animals towards home. It was a long hike. And, in the heat of the afternoon sun, both the boys and the animals were very thirsty. "We can't get all of these fine animals and then let them die of thirst," declared the younger brother.

"There has to be some water around here somewhere. We must keep our eyes and ears alert," declared the older brother.

A little while later, the older brother thought he heard the rushing of water as they approached a very steep cliff. He peered over the edge and then let out a cry for joy. "Water! Tie a rope around me and lower me down the side of the cliff. After I have had my fill, I'll do the same for you." The younger brother did just that, and it wasn't long before his brother was back up the side of the cliff, refreshed and satisfied.

"My turn!" exclaimed the younger brother. "I wish I could just fly down the side of the cliff. I'm so thirsty I can hardly stand it." He was in too much of a hurry for his drink to notice an evil smile that crossed his brother's face. Yes, the younger brother was safely lowered down the side of the cliff. However, as soon as he arrived at the bottom, his brother flicked the end of the rope over the edge as well. "There is no way for him to climb up that cliff," smiled the older brother. "And when he perishes, as he will, all of these herds will then become mine." Then, he turned his back on his younger brother and started the long and tiring journey home with the flocks.

There was great excitement in the village as the brother entered with his herds. "An old woman gave me these animals," he joyfully explained. "I haven't even had time to count how many there are in the herd."

But there was no joy in his mother's eyes. She scanned over the herd of animals in search of her younger son. "Where is your brother?" she finally asked.

"He isn't here? I haven't seen him since early afternoon. He said he was tired and wanted to return home," lied the older brother. "I really could have used his help with all of these animals, too."

"It is not like him to tire while hunting," observed the father.

"And, he should be home now that it is getting dark," added the mother.

Of course, the younger brother never came home. His mother listened for his return throughout the night. In the morning, she searched the horizon for any sign of him. She strained her ears to hear his voice announcing his return. The only unusual sound she heard that morning was the singing of a honey-bird. "This could be a good omen" she thought. "If the village men follow this bird's song, it should lead them to the bees' nest for honey. On a day like this, we could use that kind of good fortune."

Several of the village men, including the father of the missing boy, set off to follow the honey-bird. Normally, it didn't take long to locate the bees' nest, but this day was not normal. The honey-bird led the men across the fields and deep into the bush. The little bird, and the men that followed her, only rested for brief moments. Then, the honey-bird continued to lead the men further into the bush.

"I've had just about all of this honey-bird that I care to follow," declared one old hunter. "There is no honey out here today. I for one am very tired and want to go home."

And, at that moment, something very unusual happened. The little honey-bird chirped louder than anyone had ever heard one before. Then, she fluttered her wings violently as she raced around the men.

"I've never seen anything like this," declared the old hunter.

"It's almost like she understood the words you said and wanted to change your mind," observed the father of the missing boy. "I think we need to follow this little bird a little further."

So, the men followed the little honey-bird deeper into the bush. She brought them to a high cliff that none of the men ever remembered seeing before. Then, the bird swooped up and down, luring the men to the very edge of the cliff. Finally, she dived completely out of their sight towards the bottom of the cliff.

The father of the missing boy peered over the edge and let out a cry of joy. "My son! This little honey-bird has brought us to my son, and now she rests at his feet."

Very quickly the men of the village fashioned a strong rope from creepers they found growing about. In no time at all, the missing son was brought up the side of the cliff. Then, the whole truth about the older brother was

revealed.

"That son shall be severely punished!" declared the old hunter. "This kind of greed will not be tolerated in our village."

Everyone, including the father of the two boys, agreed with the hunter. However, there would be no punishment for the older brother. Somehow he must have known that the suspicious honey-bird would lead to his younger brother's rescue. Before the village men returned home, the older brother fled, never to be seen again.

As for the younger brother, his herds prospered and he became a very wealthy man. He was easily able to care for his parents in their old age. And, he always had plenty of fresh honey for them. For you see, from that day on, the younger son was always the first to hear the honey-bird's song.